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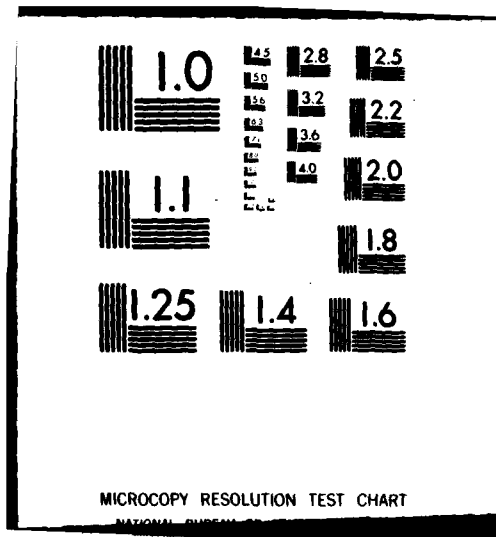
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CUBA: THE NEW ORTHODOXY AND THE RESURGENCE OF FIDEL

by
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The concluding months of 1975 saw Cuba again in the international spotlight.

In November came the first disclosures that Cuban combat forces had been sent to aid the Marxist-oriented and Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the civil war that had broken out in the newly independent African state. By mid-December, the Cuban build-up was estimated at between 3,000 to 5,000 troops, with the latter employing some 27 shiploads and 30 planeloads of Soviet equipment sent directly to Angola from the U.S.S.R. This was by the far the largest contingent of Cuban military personnel sent overseas, dwarfing the 300 to 400 tank crew and air force personnel said to be Syria. While the Cuban involvement on behalf of the MPLA dramatized the Castro government's readiness to render material aid to leftist movements in the Third World, it also illustrated the extent to which Cuban foreign policy had become synchronized with, and supportive of, Soviet international objectives.

In the meantime, Cuba's Angolan involvement ended the cautious moves that had been undertaken by both Washington and Havana toward normalizing relations between the two countries. On December 20, President Ford stressed that Cuba's activities in Angola, and in Puerto Rico as well, "... destroys any opportunity for improvement of relations with the United States."³ Fidel Castro replied two days later.

¹Gerald J. Bender, "Angola: A New Quagmire for U.S.," Los Angeles Times, December 21, 1975, Part VII, pp. 1, 4.

²One conservative estimate in early December placed the total number of Cuban military personnel, including advisors and technicians, at 5,000 in 10 countries inclusive of Angola and Syria. See U.S. News and World Report, December 8, 1975, p. 27.

³The New York Times, December 21, 1975, p. 3.

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Before a cheering audience at the First Party Congress in the Karl Marx Theatre in Havana, he proclaimed that ". . . there never will be relations with the United States" if the "price" had to be Cuba's abandonment of its "solidarity" with anti-imperialist movements in the Third World.⁴ It thus appeared that Cuba's líder máximo had reverted to style, resuming his intransigent posture toward "U.S. imperialism."

Of even greater historical significance, however, was the holding of the long awaited First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) during December 17-22.⁵ Convened fully a decade after the PCC was unveiled on October 2, 1965, the Congress had received top billing in the Cuban press, with 1975 having been officially designated as the "Year of the 1st Congress." The Congress would have been important and Secretariat. if only because it elected a new Central Committee, Political Bureau / But the Congress assumed even greater political significance because it was meant to legitimize and democratize Cuban Communism, and because it capped the process of the "institutionalization of the revolution" that had been underway since 1970. As a means of obtaining a better fix on Cuba in the mid-1970s, therefore, it would be useful to first examine the Party Congress from these three perspectives before inquiring further into Cuba's new stage of revolutionary development and its current political ramifications.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PCC CONGRESS

As a legitimizing event, the Congress became the occasion for portraying Castro's Communist regime as authentically Cuban in its origins and development.

⁴Havana Radio, December 22, 1975.

⁵The PCC Congress had originally been scheduled for 1967, but was then re-scheduled for 1969, only to be cancelled because of the priority given to the 1970 sugar harvest of 10 million tons. Finally, Raul Castro revealed that preparations were underway for holding the Congress in 1975 in a speech that he delivered in early 1974. See Granma, January 13, 1974, pp. 2-3. All references to Granma are to Weekly Review edition.

Such a legitimizing function was necessary in order to give a nationalist imprimatur to the regime's widespread adoption of Soviet-type institutions and practices in the post-1970 period. In his main report to the Congress, for example, Fidel dwelled at length on Cuba's history during the 19th and 20th centuries, maintaining that Cuban socialism was the continuation of the liberationist movement against Spanish colonial rule and the neo-colonialist encroachment of the United States. Indeed, in this regard, he even went so far as to link Cuba's most revered poet, humanist and independence leader, José Martí ("The Apostle of Freedom"), with Lenin and his revolutionary contributions in order to sanctify Cuban communism.⁶

The Congress performed still another, more important legitimizing function: it elevated the role of the "old Communists" in the Party, thereby authenticating the Marxist-Leninist credentials of the regime, and assuring Moscow of a more reliable fraternal party in Cuba. In the past, the Communist qualifications of the Castro regime had remained suspect. Thus, rather than the "old Communists" from the Moscow-oriented Popular Socialist Party (PSP), it was the fidelistas who had seized power in 1959. Even though they were considered to be radicalized sector of the petty bourgeoisie, it was the fidelistas who proclaimed Cuba's revolution to be "socialist" in April 1961, and who then continued to govern socialist Cuba without a ruling Communist party until 1965. Afterwards, it was the fidelistas who fully dominated the newly formed PCC as "new Communists," excluding the ex-PSP leaders entirely from

⁶ . . . two men from two distinct historical settings and two converging ideas -- José Martí and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin -- clasp hands. The one is a symbol of national liberation from colonial domination and imperialism; the other, the architect of the first socialist revolution in the weakest link of the imperialist chain: national liberation and socialism, two closely interwoven causes in the modern world. Both /men/ with a solid and disciplined party to carry forward revolutionary aims . . . almost simultaneously at the turn of the century." *Ibid.*, December 28, 1975, p. 2. Martí was killed in 1895 at the start of the independence struggle which he had organized, later becoming Cuba's most reknown and beloved martyr. Although he was staunchly anti-imperialist and worked to prevent U.S. penetration of Latin America his humanistic, democratic creed made him a far, far different man than Lenin, and his political philosophy quite the opposite of Leninism.

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the eight-man Political Bureau, limiting them to only 22 seats in the original 100-man Central Committee, and denying them (with but a few exceptions) major positions in the government as well. In point of fact, the "new Communists" led by Fidel had nearly devoured the "old": ex-PSP Executive-Secretary Aníbal Escalante was purged in 1962 for attempting to takeover the Integrated Revolutionary Organization, a predecessor to the PCC; ex-PSP veteran Joaquin Ordoqui was placed under house arrest in 1964 for his involvement in the notorious Marcos Rodríguez affair; and the members of, /the so-called "microfaction," led by Escalante and composed of 34 former members of the PSP, were sentenced in early 1968 to prison terms ranging from two to fifteen years for allegedly conspiring with Soviet bloc officials against the Castro regime.⁷

The Party Congress, however, restored the "old Communists" to long awaited prominence, and asserted the continuity between "old" and "new Communists" as evidence of the Marxist-Leninist legitimacy of the PCC. Thus, in his main report to the Congress, Fidel traced the PCC's lineage back to the founding of the first Marxist-Leninist party in 1925. He did so by claiming that the "old Communists" had held high the "noble banners of Marxism-Leninism," and that in many instances they had served as the "intellectual teachers" and "inspiration" for the young revolutionaries who later became the "new Communists."⁸ The restoration of the "old Communists," moreover, was not simply symbolic. As will be discussed subsequently, three "old Communists" -- Blas Roca, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, and Arnaldo Milian -- were elevated to the Political Bureau as a result of the decision of the Congress to expand the eight-man Political Bureau to thirteen members. In the meantime, as will be seen, the role of the PCC as a ruling Communist party had been further strengthened by the rapid expansion of Party membership in the post-1970 period,

⁷For a detailed analysis of the relationship between the fidelistas and old guard Communists in the creation of a single party apparatus through the 1966 period, see Andres Suarez, Cuba: Castroism and Communism, 1959-1966 (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1967). For a more recent analysis : through the early 1970s, see Edward González, Cuba Under Castro: The Limits of Charisma (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974, esp. pp. 96-106, and 169-189.

⁸Granma, December 28, 1975, p. 3.

reaching 202,807 "militants and aspirants" by the end of September 1975.⁹ The full ring of orthodoxy was added by the Congress with its adoption of the Party platform which is based on "Marxist-Leninist principles" and stresses the "leading role of the PCC."¹⁰ Fully a decade after its founding, therefore, Cuba's Communist Party had become closely modeled after its Soviet counterpart.

The Congress was also staged as a democratizing event. Despite its mobilization of the popular masses, the Cuban Revolution had essentially been an elite affair from its inception. Thus, the anti-Batista struggle was begun by Fidel and a small group of his followers. Once in power, the new fidelista regime imposed "socialism" and other fundamental policies upon society at large without the participation, much less the approval, of the masses. The predecessors to the PCC -- the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI), and the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (PURS) -- as well as the PCC itself had been erected by the leadership, and even dismantled as in the case of the ORI and PURS, without notice and with little grass-roots membership. Indeed, according to Fidel himself, the PCC initially had less than 50,000 members and aspirant members when it was created in 1965.¹¹ Furthermore, the PCC Central Committee, as well as the eight-man Political Bureau, remained a closed, oligarchical organ: membership to the Central Committee was appointive; its members came largely from the ranks of the combatants in the anti-Batista struggle, with no less than 72 of the original 100-man Central Committee/^{members} having military titles; and despite the subsequent loss of nine of its members after 1965, no new members were added.¹²

⁹Ibid., January 4, 1976, p. 9.

¹⁰Radio Havana, December 21, 1975.

¹¹Granma, January 4, 1976, p. 9.

¹²On the elitist character of the regime, see Gonzalez, op. cit., pp. 79-110, and 153-182. See also K.S. Karol, The Guerrillas in Power (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970).

The preparations preceeding the Congress, along with the Congress itself, thereby further enhancing its legitimacy., sought to reverse the Party's closed, elitist image. According to Raúl Castro, for example, the Party platform had been discussed in over 110,000 meetings in which over 4 million citizens participated.¹³ In thus opening the Congress, he ^{have} claimed that never before had the Cuban people had ". . . the opportunity to participate directly and in such a broad and democratic way in the discussion of all those fundamental matters related to their lives, their problems, their future, and the future of the fatherland."¹⁴ In addition to mass consultation, the PCC also engaged the participation of its rank-and-file members in the selection of Party cadres and leaders by means of Party elections, beginning at the local and extending upwards to the provincial and national levels. As a result of this procedure, the elected delegates to the provincial Party assemblies, and to the Party conferences held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces, elected the six new provincial Committees of the PCC, the 3,116 delegates attending the Congress, and the nominee candidates for the Central Committee. The Congress then "elected" on the basis of "virtual unanimity," to use Fidel's own words, the Central Committee members and alternates proposed by the Party leadership, with the new Central Committee finally selecting the new Political Bureau (13), the new Secretariat (9), and the First (Fidel) and Second (Raúl) Secretaries.¹⁵ ^{stated} One of the ^{aims} of the Congress was to "rennovate" the membership of the Central Committee on the basis not only of merit, but also broader representation of Cuban society and activities. Consequently the Congress ^{also} expanded the 91-man Central Committee to 112 members (plus 12 alternates), dropping ¹⁴ former members and adding 35 new members.¹⁶

¹³Havana Radio, December 21, 1975.

¹⁴Havana Radio, December 18, 1975.

¹⁵Havana Radio, December 22, 1974.

¹⁶The tally is computed on the basis of information supplied by Havana Radio, December 22, 1975, and the listings contained in the Central Intelligence Agency, Directory of Personalities of the Cuban Government, Official Organizations and Mass Organizations, A (CR) 74-7, March 1974.

Most important of all, the Congress was the capstone to the "institutionalization of the revolution" that had gained momentum since the early 1970s. As will be detailed below, the major elements of Cuba's new stage consisted of the depersonalization of governance under Fidel, the strengthening of the role of the Government and Party along lines of the Soviet political order, and the widespread incorporation of Soviet-type administrative and economic practices. As part of the new stage, moreover, Soviet influence over Cuba's domestic and foreign affairs increased to an extent unknown in the 1960s, while the Cuban economy became ever more closely integrated with that of the U.S.S.R.

The results of the Congress reflected these domestic and external forces at work. The Congress not only selected a new Central Committee, Political Bureau and Secretariat, but also it approved Cuba's first socialist constitution which will be submitted to a popular referendum on February 15, 1976. It approved the Party platform which is to serve as the "guiding document" for all Party work until the "definitive program" is approved at the second congress in 1980, and which in the meantime proposes the "creative" use of "... the experiences of the Soviet Union and other countries of the socialist community in the building of socialism."¹⁷ It further adopted Cuba's Five Year Plan for 1976-80 which calls for a six percent annual growth rate and closer economic integration with the Soviet Union; and ~~it adopted~~ a new economic system which Fidel himself admitted ^{the} is modeled on "the practice existing in all/socialist countries."¹⁸ And in the main, the Congress provided an international forum in which the Cuban leadership paid tribute to the Soviet Union. Hence, in his concluding speech, Fidel declared that the U.S.S.R. was

... a country that has given us great demonstrations of and lessons on internationalism. Despite the distance, it did not permit imperialism to choke us, swallow us and destroy us. It sent us oil when they left us without oil. It sent us arms when aggression was threatened us. It also sent its men here to this country.¹⁸

¹⁷Radio Havana, December 20, 1975.

¹⁸Radio Havana, December 22, 1975.

TOWARD THE SOVIETIZATION OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION?

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Even so cursory a review of/latest developments suggests that the Cuban Revolution has undergone a fundamental transformation since the late 1960s. At that time, Fidel still ruled in caudillistic fashion on the basis of his personal charismatic authority; the fidelistas retained full control of the government, Party and armed forces; and fidelismo or guerrilla radicalism prevailed over orthodox Marxism-Leninism and Soviet style economic planning.¹⁹ Until Fidel's endorsement of the Warsaw Pact occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, moreover, Havana often displayed considerable independence from and even defiance of Moscow on the foreign policy front.²⁰ Why, then, has the Castro regime evidently succumbed to the Sovietization of the Cuban Revolution? Or is perhaps such a judgement somewhat premature, and the generalization overdrawn? Put differently, do some vestiges of the former fidelista hegemony and autonomy remain in the Cuba of 1976 despite institutionalization along Soviet lines, the rising influence of the "old Communists," and heightened conformity with Moscow's policies at home and abroad?

To gain perspective on these questions, this analysis will briefly recapitulate those events that precipitated Cuba's new stage in the post-1970 period. It will then proceed with an examination of the process of institutionalization and of the accompanying growth in Soviet influence that have characterized this latest period. It will conclude by making the following points: first, despite a more institutionalized order, heightened Soviet influence, and a strengthening of the role of the "old Communists," Fidel and his brother, Raúl, remain very much in control of Cuban affairs; and second, nonetheless, Fidel is also likely to confront new pressures and demands in his leadership owing to the broader elite coalition now ruling Cuba, as well to the tighter links with Moscow; and third, as a result, Cuban policy may well become more volatile in the future.

¹⁹On these aspects see Gonzalez, Cuba Under Castro: The Limits of Charisma; and Carmelo Mesa-Lago (ed.), Revolutionary Change in Cuba (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971).

²⁰See Edward Gonzalez, "Relationship with the Soviet Union," in ibid., pp. 81-10 and Leon Goure and Julian Weinkle, "Soviet-Cuban Relations: The Growing Integration," in Jaime Suchlicki (ed.), Cuba, Castro, and Revolution (Coral Gables: The University of Miami Press, 1972), pp. 144-189.